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*Religion productive of Joy, and consistent
with Politeness.*

A 6,
S E R M O N

PREACHED at the
Abbey-Church at *Bath*,
APRIL 16, 1744;

A N D,
PUBLISHED in Order to wipe off the
Aspersions that have been cast upon
it by the METHODISTS.

By *W. HOWDELL*, M. A.
of *East-Hardwick*, YORKSHIRE.

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Register of the
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By W. M. A.
of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts
Printed by J. W. M. A. at the Press of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts
1744

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T O T H E
R E A D E R.



*W*HEN this Discourse was preached, I had not the least Thought of its ever being published; and it now goes into the World, not because many who heard it were pleased to approve it, but because some of the Persons, against whom several Parts of it were levelled, very severely condemned it, and expected that either my Sermon should be printed, or my Doctrine publicly recanted; and that in the Abbey-Church where it was preached. It is not, therefore, Vanity which has induced me, but Necessity which has compelled me to publish it. My Doctrine has been charged with being false, and contrary to Scripture; but as I see no Reason for so hea-

by a Charge, I have nothing else to wish, but that my Sermon could recommend it self as well in other Respects, as, I hope, it will be able to stand its Ground in this. Had I been censured by my Adversaries at Bath only, I might have thought my self less obliged to take Notice of them, but as their Clamour against me stopped not there, but industriously pursued me to the Country and Neighbourhood where I live, I could no longer hesitate in Regard to the Vindication of my Doctrine, but immediately resolved to appeal to the Publick; that every unprejudiced Person may judge, whether I have perverted Scripture, or they unjustly reflected on the Construction I have put upon it.



PHILIP.



PHILIPPIANS iv. ver. 4.

*Rejoice in the Lord always, and again
I say rejoice.*



HAVE made Choice of these Words, with some View to those, who have been pleased to represent the Christian Religion in a false and disadvantageous Light, painting it in the darkest, and most gloomy Colours, and giving it a discouraging and frightful Aspect.

Would we win Men over to the Christian Religion, we need only to shew it in its own native Features, and then, it
B will

will be so far from being disagreeable and terrible, that it will appear most amiable and charming to all its Beholders.

But on the contrary, when we paint it, as some Men do, not with an open and chearful, but with a sour and morose Countenance, instead of engaging, it forbids us to embrace it. Thus, through a mistaken Zeal, they debase Christianity, instead of exalting it; for Men in their right Minds can never be persuaded to think, that God intended in general to make Misery the Road to Virtue; (a) nay, but that he actually did intend, we should enjoy as much Happiness in this Life as is consistent with our greatest and supreme Good. As God's Goodness was the principal Motive inducing Him to create us, so the same Goodness must allow us to consult our Happiness. And tho' the present World is properly a State of Trial, in which we must meet, and consequently struggle with many Difficulties; yet as the Spirit of God will be ever ready to assist those who are disposed to fulfil their Duty, those Difficulties

(a) Mr *Wollaston's* Religion of Nature, *Seet.* 9. Page 174, 175.

ties will be easily surmounted, and the Service of Christ become pleasing and delightful ; *His Yoke is easy and his Burthen light*. On the contrary every Breach of the Divine Laws is naturally succeeded by Anguish and Remorse ; and a Course of Disobedience to them, will in its Consequences lead to a Life of settled Discontent and Misery.

Let us then pursue Religion as the surest Means of attaining true Happiness, and the best Preservative against Moroseness and Austerity ; (b) assuring ourselves that she is so far from curbing our reasonable Appetites, that she restrains us from nothing but what would be our Unhappiness to indulge in. *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice ; viz.* as a learned Commentator observes, (c) ' Whatever Afflictions or Persecutions befall you in the Service of Christ, let
B 2 ' them

(b) Mr *Straight's* ingenious Sermon upon the Nature and Advantage of Self-Denial, ' Love yourselves to the uttermost, deny yourselves nothing but what is upon the whole disadvantageous, nothing but what is destructive of your highest Happiness.

(c) Dr *Hammond*.

‘ them be Matter of continual rejoicing
 ‘ to you;’ or in other Words, Though
 in the World ye may meet with Tribu-
 lation, yet in the Service of God ye will
 find an abundance of Joy: How much
 more, therefore, should we at this Day
 rejoice, who are not in a State of Perse-
 cution, nor consequently disturbed, as the
 first Ages of Christianity were, in the
 Practice of our Duty, and the Pursuit of
 our everlasting Happiness.

In discoursing to you upon the Words
 of my Text, I shall shew,

I. That a due Sense of God, or the
 Practice of Virtue and Religion in gene-
 ral, naturally produces Joy and Chear-
 fulness in the Mind of Man.

II. That the Christian Religion in par-
 ticular encourages and promotes them.

1st. That a due Sense of God, or the
 Practice of Virtue and Religion, natural-
 ly produces Joy and Chearfulness in the
 Mind of Man.

He who lives under an habitual Sense
 of the Divine Being and his Perfections;
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who considers him as his great Creator, his constant Preserver, and most merciful Redeemer : He who views him as his righteous Judge, that will not only upon true Repentance, pardon his numberless Sins, and vilest Offences, but also crown his sincere, though imperfect Services, with endless, ineffable Happiness ; must feel a substantial Pleasure in the Contemplation of his most amiable Attributes, and can never want Motives (if he has any Ingenuity, or Sense of Gratitude in him) to act in strict Conformity to his Sacred Will. And if this good Being (whose Dispensations towards his rational Creatures are always built upon the wisest Reasons) sometimes permits him to be acquainted with Grief, and suffers evil Men and evil Spirits to assault and outrage him ; yet when he considers himself here as in a State of Probation, and that his future Rewards will infinitely overbalance his present Afflictions, he will find something ever ready to refresh his Spirits, and administer Comfort to him under the greatest Weight and Anguish of them. For, can he, that considers this present Life only as a short Journey that will quickly be run over, and the Pleasures,

Pleasures, with which he hopes to be crowned, at the End of it, in themselves inexpressibly great, and eternal in their Duration; how can he, I say, ever want abundant Matter to gladden his Heart, and sweeten the Pilgrimage of the bitterest Life?

Not, that Religion, like the pretended Wisdom of the *Stoics*, makes Men insensible of Pain. Fact and Experience prove the contrary; but, then, we affirm that Religion is the best, nay, the only Support under Pain. And a substantial Support it is, to consider with ourselves, that, besides the present Approbation and Applause of our own Hearts, which will ever flow in upon us from a Review of our past Actions, he who lays those Miseries upon us, or permits them to befall us, will repay our patient enduring of them with an endless and uninterrupted State of Happiness; with a Degree of Bliss so excessively great, as Eye hath not seen nor Ear heard; neither hath it entred into the Heart of Man to conceive.

Upon the whole, we may take it for granted,

granted, that the Man whom a Spirit of Religion actuates, feels abundantly more Joy springing up in his Breast, than he who is forgetful of God, and has a Heart insensible, or regardless of his Duty.

(d) Nay, the Life of the wicked Man, when overcast with Troubles, will be most exquisitely miserable. For, when all worldly Comforts fail him, to what can he resort that will afford him Consolation? Upon what can he anchor his unstable Soul? To what can he flee for Refuge in the Days of his Distress? If he is depriv'd of Happiness on Earth, he has not the least Hopes of any in Heaven. In this forlorn Condition, he is like the troubled Sea that cannot rest, being outwardly distress'd by worldly Sorrows, and inwardly distracted by the Horrors of a guilty Mind. In this sad, this miserable State, which Way can he turn himself for Ease, or where can he apply for any the least Abatement of his Pains? If he looks backwards upon his past Life, Remorse of Conscience peirces his Heart, and Self-Condernation wounds his Spirit. If he looks forward, and extends his Thoughts

(d) *Nemo malus felix.*

JUVENAL.

Thoughts beyond this perishing Scene, the different Prospects of Eternity, the Happiness of the Blessed in Heaven which he must not enjoy, and the Torments of the Damn'd in Hell which he cannot avoid, mutually conspire to aggravate the Weight of his Afflictions. So that human Imagination cannot paint to itself a more unhappy, miserable Creature in the Life now present.

But the Man whose Ways are of another Fashion, whose Life has been formed on the true Christian Model, directed by the holy Spirit of God, and governed by his righteous Laws, will be differently affected with the Review of his past Conduct, and the Prospect of a future State. Religion gives to him infinitely the Preference and Advantage over the wicked. For when he reflects upon his past Life, his own Heart not only approves, but applauds his Actions. When he looks forward to the great Recompence that will hereafter be made him, he can thence derive Comfort and Satisfaction, even though the whole Creation should be frowning upon him, and all Nature looking black about him.

Other

Other Arguments will offer themselves to us, if we consider the natural Tendency of some particular Virtues to the Promotion of Happiness. (e) Do not the Virtues of Temperance and Chastity, for Instance, naturally produce Joy and Chearfulness in those that possess them? (f) Do they not yield unto them many easy Reflections of Mind, and exempt them from many painful Disorders of Body, which often rack and torture the sensual and the voluptuous? (g) Nay, how much better does the temperate and sober Man relish the Enjoyments of Life, than the intemperate and the debauched? Does not the former by moderating his Appetites preserve their Freshness and Vigour, and enable them to taste the good Things of Life with the highest Satisfaction; while the other loses his Relish and Enjoyment of them, by having too much indulg'd himself in them? Besides, Temperance and Chastity, Accidents

(e) *Accipe nunc, Victus tenuis quæ quantaq; secum
Afferat, &c.* HORACE.

(f) *Conscientia bene actæ Vitæ multorumque benefactorum
Recordatio jucundissima est.* Tully de Senectute.

(g) *Voluptates commendat rarior Ufus.*

dents excepted, (*b*) do not only prolong our Lives, but naturally entail a Fund of Health and Happiness upon us in old Age, as they prevent our sowing the Seeds of many painful Distempers, which a free licentious Life breeds in us; and likewise check us from an extravagant Profusion of that Substance (*i*) which should nourish and comfort us in the Days of Infirmary. How will it aggravate the Miseries of the sensual, to reflect, that, besides the Pains they have brought upon themselves by their youthful Sal- lies, they have wanton'd away in Excess and Riot that Substance, which should have been their Support, when they are the least able to help themselves, and Nature stands in the greatest Need? Let such as these be advised to make their Repentance as publick as their Follies; that others may be prevented from following their fatal Examples, and that they themselves may in some Measure atone for them, by being the Means of preserv- ing some, as they have been the wicked Occasion

(*b*) *Immodicis brevis est Ætas et rara Senectus.*

HORACE.

(*i*)

Dura Valetudo inciderit vel tarda Senectus. Ibid.

Occasion of misleading and debauching others. These Reflections not only shew us the Joy and Pleasure, which naturally flow from Temperance and Chastity, but also teach us to avoid those Miseries, into which the intemperate and the sensual are so often plunged.

Had we Time to touch upon all the Virtues, we might easily shew, how highly the Practice of each of them contributes, (*k*) not only to the Good of every single Member in particular, but also to the Happiness of the whole Society in general; whilst Luxury and Debauchery have very opposite Consequences attending them. (*l*) By these, as History informs us, the most flourishing Empires have been brought to Decay and Ruin; and the Prosperity and Happiness of States and Kingdoms have ebb'd and flow'd, in the same Proportion as these Vices have either prevailed or lost Ground. For have not these, by break-

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(*k*) Dr Clarke's most excellent Treatise upon the Evidence of natural and reveal'd Religion. Page 103, 104.

(*l*) Tully de Senect. *Quo facilius vinci possent cum voluptatibus dedissent.*

ing the Constitutions of Individuals, a natural Tendency to weaken and enervate by Degrees a whole Nation, and make it become an easy Prey to any ambitious invading Power? On the other hand, do not Temperance and Purity fortify the Bodies and Minds of the People, and spirit 'em up bravely to oppose all those who attempt to conquer or enslave them?

The Truth of what I have here hinted is so plain and obvious, so agreeable to Reason, and so confirmed by Facts, that it exposes the Absurdity of that pernicious and detestable Maxim, (*m*) of private Vices being publick Benefits, to the slightest View of the most superficial Inquirer.

I have now said enough to shew, that the Practice of Virtue and Religion, instead of sinking, naturally tends to raise Men's Spirits, and instead of causing a heavy Heart, and a melancholy Face, diffuses Gladness through the one, and lights up the other with Joy. But,
what

(*m*) The Fable of the Bees.

what a different Kind of Spirit are the high-strained, impracticable Notions of a modern Set of People likely to produce in us, and how do they lead to Melancholy and Despair, instead of Joy and Chearfulness? That these Notions of theirs are without Foundation, will more plainly appear from my second Head of Discourse, in which I am to shew,

2dly. That the Christian Religion encourages and promotes Joy and Chearfulness in the Mind of Man.

St Paul in his Epistle to the *Coloss.* iv. 6. after having exhorted them to *walk with Wisdom towards those that are without, viz.* To behave with Prudence and Discretion towards the unconverted World, adds, *Let your Speech be always with Grace;* ‘(n) let it not be ‘whining and melancholy but sprightly ‘and chearful.’ And in his 5th Chap. to the *Thess.* and 16 Ver. *Rejoice evermore;* which Passage very much resembles the Words of my Text, *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.* The
Apostle

(n) Dr Hammond's Comment, and Dr Scott's Christian Life, Vol. I. Chap. 4. Sect. 3. Page 285.

Apostle in another Place reckons Joy and Chearfulness amongst the blessed Fruits and Effects of the Spirit, *The Fruit of the Spirit is Love and Joy.* And in another Place he makes the Christian Law to consist *not in Meat and in Drink, viz.* In needless and unnecessary Injunctions, *but in Righteousness and Peace and Joy in the Holy Ghost.* Which being opposed to Things unnecessary, must imply that those are necessary, and therefore, if by Righteousness and Peace be meant Justice and Peaceableness, and by Joy in the Holy Ghost Chearfulness and Alacrity in the Discharge of our Duty, then the last of these has an equal Title with the two former to be rank'd among the essential Duties of the Christian Religion. Our Saviour has a very remarkable Passage to our present Purpose, in the 6th Chap. of St *John's* Gospel, *When ye fast, be not as the Hypocrites of a sad Countenance, for they disfigure their Faces that they may appear unto Men to fast;* and as he forbids us to be of a sad Countenance when we fast, and consequently when we pray, Fasting and Prayer usually accompanying each other, so he enjoins us to be chearful not melancholy and dejected

jected in the Performance of this Duty. Nay, he lays a most severe Charge upon those that are so; he accuses them of Hypocrisy; and as he knew the Hearts of Men his Accusation must be just. But as for ourselves who see not the Springs and Motives of Men's Actions, let us not presume to pronounce so heavy a Sentence against them; Modesty however allows us to say, that their Behaviour is wrong, and their Practice erroneous. But notwithstanding these Errors, they arrogantly pretend to a more than ordinary Measure of the Spirit of God, which, when you desire them to demonstrate, their Answer is, that they feel strange Joys and inconceivable Raptures, which are only to be felt, not express'd. So that we may, if we please, believe them inspired, upon their own naked Assertions, without any Work or Miracle to prove that they are so. But Strength of Persuasion is no Mark of Divine Inspiration, (a) 'it only proves that to be a Fondling of their own which they falsely call the Offspring of God. Nay, since the Fruits of the good Spirit are
Peace

(a) Mr Lock upon Enthusiasm.

Peace and Joy, we may be sure, if they are inspired, they are not inspired by that Spirit; a gloomy Look, and mournful Tone, when they are not the Result of natural Constitution, looking rather like the genuine Fruits of an evil One.

But, notwithstanding the Christian Religion encourages and promotes Chearfulness and Pleasure in those that profess it, yet it does not appear from these sacred Writings, that the settled Pleasure, and steady Chearfulness, which the Practice of it produces, are therefore to be attained suddenly, or by any single Act; but ordinarily, by an uniform Course, or Habit of Virtue, by him who gradually ripens into Perfection, who grows in Grace 'till he comes unto a perfect Man, unto the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ. But how different from this regular Growth, and gradual Advancement in Religion, are the ungrounded Pretensions of some, who grow holy by a sudden instantaneous Influx of the Spirit, and from the most wretched Sinners immediately become Saints? How is this Change which is wrought in one Moment, reconcileable with St Peter's Gradation of Virtues?

Virtues? *Giving all Diligence add to your Faith, Virtue; and to Virtue, Knowledge; and to Knowledge, Temperance; and to Temperance, Patience; and to Patience, Godliness; and to Godliness, Brotherly-Kindness; and to Brotherly-Kindness, Charity.*

After a Man, indeed, has spent many of his Days in a long Course of habitual Wickedness, he will be so far from feeling that Joy and Gladness which a virtuous Life produces, that we are not to wonder if we see him smiting upon his Breast, and plunging himself into the deepest Sorrow.

The first Essays to Repentance must be grievous, and raise in him the utmost Pain and Confusion; but when he comes to be inured to a Life of Religion, (*p*) Custom will make it familiar, Familiarity will make it easy, and at last Joy and Pleasure will as naturally flow in upon the Practice of it, as Light does from the Body of the Sun. Nay, Chearfulness and Pleasure are the natural Attendants

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(*p*) *Optimum Vitæ Genus eligito, & Consuetudo faciet jucundissimum.*
Tully de Senectute.

upon all Christian Duties: Why, therefore, does the Man, who calls himself emphatically *The Believer*, who pretends to be solely guided and directed by that Spirit, the Fruits of which are Peace, Joy, and to have an Earnest, an Assurance of a Heavenly Reward; why does he not shew as much Chearfulness in his Face, as he feels Joy springing up in his Breast? The want of this Mark of the Spirit would almost induce a charitable Man to think, that his Pretensions to it are vain, and his Assurance Presumption.

We may go on to observe that, Spiritual Pride and Presumption, are the common and ordinary Effects of Enthusiasm, 'For when Men are inflamed with their own Devotions, they are too much inclined to think they are not of their own Kindling, but blown up by something Divine within them.' This makes them proud of their own Opinions, and naturally leads them to undervalue that Knowledge which is acquired by Human Means, or, to use the Language of Holy Writ, to *boast themselves that they are righteous, and despise others.*

I shall go on to make one Remark more in Favour of the Christian Religion, and 'tis this; that it not only disallows of all Sourness and Moroseness in the Practice of it, but is quite consistent with, and in some Respects productive of Politeness and Good-breeding.

If Meekness and Affability, Courtesy and Condescension, if adapting ourselves to the Tastes and Sentiments of those with whom we converse, or, as the Scripture expresses it, becoming all Things to all Men, as far as Reason and Innocence will allow, are Marks of Politeness and Good-breeding, then the Christian System, in these Respects, infinitely excels all other religious Institutions that ever were in the World. (q) If the End of Good-breeding is to exalt and refine the Nature of Man, what can exalt and refine it more, than the Religion of Christ? This not only checks and restrains all irregular

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(q) Mr *Foster's* ingenious Sermon upon the peculiar Infamy of Vice in an enlightened and polite Age. 'Outward Forms of Politeness are capricious and variable, and then only it is a Name of any valuable Significancy, when human Nature itself is polished, when the Soul is purged from all Habits of Wickedness, &c.'

and disorderly Appetites that debase and degrade us, but pares away and cuts off every Thing that's wild and savage in us. It not only raises us infinitely above the Brute Creation, but when practis'd to the highest Perfection exalts the Man into an Angel: So that the Christian Religion is so far from discountenancing Politeness and Good-breeding, that it helps to promote them, and would be more engaging to many who think themselves fine Gentlemen, was it impartially examined, and better understood by them.

How remarkable was the Behaviour of St *Paul* to our present Purpose, when pleading his Cause before King *Agrippa*? *King Agrippa believest thou the Prophets, I know that thou believest them?* (r) Here he anticipates the Answer, as if he had put the Question too home, and replies for him in the genteelest and most winning Manner, *I know that thou believest*. The Reasonableness of the Question, and the Delicacy of the Answer, so touched his Princely Mind, that he ingenuously confessed, *almost thou persuadest*

(r) Sir *Richard Steel's* Character of St *Paul* as a well bred Man and fine Gentleman.

swadest me to be a Christian. (s) The Apostle in Return shews, the great Power of his own perswasive Words, and a Taste inimitably fine. *I would to God that not only Thou, but all that hear me this Day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these Bonds.* Here the polite and well-bred Man, who is supposed to have his Heart filled with the warmest Affection, and the most unbounded Benevolence to his Fellow-Creatures, breaks forth and displays himself in a Manner peculiarly illustrious. After having wished *Agrippa* to be like himself, as much a Christian and a Believer, as he was, by which he wished him a Felicity infinitely transcending all earthly Grandeur and Glory, he then drops the Comparison, and desires that the Likeness between them may be extended no farther; but that the Case of his being a *Prisoner of Jesus Christ*, and *in Bonds*, might be always excepted and never affect Him.

So that the Religion of *Jesus* not only encourages Joy and Chearfulness amongst its Followers, but is quite consistent

(s) *Blackwall* upon the Sacred Classics.

fluent with, and in some Respects, productive of Politeness and Good-breeding.

Let us not, therefore, set off Religion in a false Light, by ascribing to her those Features that deform instead of adorning her, but paint her as she really ought to be painted, with a pleasing and an inviting Aspect.

Man is not only a reasonable, but a social Being; Reason, therefore, not only directs, but Society obliges him to contribute to the Pleasure and Happiness of those around him. (t) All innocent Mirth, and easy Pleasantries in Conversation, as well as innocent Recreations, are so far from being unallowable, that they are commendable, and tend to the Honour

(t) The Marriage of *Cana* in *Galilee* is an incontestable Proof of this Part of my Doctrine. See Dr *Scott* to this Purpose, *Vol. 1. Chap. 4. Sect. 3. Page 223, 224, 225, &c.* Also, Mr *Straight's* Sermon upon the Character of the Scorners, 'We allow, says he, that this Faculty, viz. *Risibility*, was not given to us in vain; that there are proper Times and Occasions to laugh; that Wit and Railery are Accomplishments, in their due Place worthy to be esteemed.

Honour and Glory of God, as they promote the Happiness of Man. Let not then the *Enthusiast*, who works powerfully upon vulgar Minds, brand the chearful Christian, with the odious Names of Levity or Wantonness, and miscall innocent Jest, idle Words; idle Words in Scripture implying false, or blasphemous Language, such as was that of the *Pharisees* (*u*), whereby they ascribed the Miracles of Christ to the Power of the Devil.

On the other Side let us observe, that as all innocent Mirth and Facetiousness are very allowable in our Conversations, yet we must take great Care to keep ourselves always within the Bounds of Decency and Religion, and then we shall neither offend God, nor displease Man, but advance the Happiness of the one, and the Glory of the other. Let all prophane Jest and reproachful Mirth, be branded with the most odious Marks of Disgrace, and all obscene and filthy Discourse, which flows from a corrupt and a debauched Heart, become unfashionable

(*u*) Dr Hammond, Matt. xii. 36.

ble and be discouraged by all Men; thus
shall we adorn our most holy Profession,
and set it off in a true Light.

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